

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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R 130830Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6882

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY ROME

AEMBASSY SANTIAGO 05

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L VALLETTA 0807

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PDIP, PFOR, MT, AS

SUBJECT: DIPLOMATIC CORPS CHANGES IN MALTA

1. AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER TO MALTA IAN NICHOLSON DEPARTED ON JULY 10 EN ROUTE TO CHILE TO BECOME AUSTRALIA'S NEW AMBSSSSADOR TO THAT COUNTRY. ACCOMPANIED BY HIS WIFE AND THREE DAUGHTERS, HE WILL ARRIVE IN SANTIAGO LATER THIS MONTH AFTER SOME TEN DAYS LEAVE IN LONDON, BUT WITHOUT CONSULTATIONS IN CANBERRA. AN OLDER SON WILL JOIN THEM IN SANTIAGO.
2. NICHOLSON, 43, IS AN ABLE CAREER OFFICER WITH WHOM WE HAD CLOSE AND CORDIAL RELATIONS THROUGHOUT HIS ABBREVIATED (14 MONTHS) TOUR HERE. HE AND HIS WIFE ARE LAWYERS, AND BOTH ARE BRIGHT, WARM, ENERGETIC AND IMMENSELY LIKEABLE. BOTH ARE SPORTS ENTHUSIASTS, PLAYING TENNIS, SWIMMING AND SAILING. ALTHOUGH NICHOLSON DOES NOT SPEAK SPANISH, EMBASSY SANTIAGO WILL FIND HIM COMPETENT AND PROFESSIONAL.
3. NICHOLSON'S BRIEF TOUR HERE WAS MARRED BY THE LEGACY

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OF DISTINCTLY CHILLY OFFICIAL MALTESE-AUSTRALIAN RELATIONS.

DEPSITE THE HUGE NUMBER OF MALTESE EMIGRANTS GOING TO AUSTRALIA IN RECENT YEARS, AND SHARPLY INCREASED TRADE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF HAS BEEN MIFFED FOR SOME TIME BY WHAT HE CONSIDERS AUSTRALIA'S "FAILURE" TO PROVIDE MALTA WITH "ADEQUATE" AID AND ASSISTANCE. AS A RESULT, NICHOLSON'S IMMEDIATE PREDECESSOR WAS JOT RECEIVED BY MINTOFF AGAIN FOR ALMOST TWO YEARS AFTER HIS INITIAL PRESENTATION OF CREDENTIALS AND COURTESY CALL.

4. UPON NICHOLSON'S ARRIVAL, MINTOFF FLATLY REFUSED TO RECEIVE HIM AT ALL, INSTRUCTING FOREIGN SECRETARY ABELA TO TELL NICHOLSON THAT HE WOULD NOT DO SO UNTIL AUSTRALIA WAS "MORE FORTHCOMING" IN ITS AID TO MALTA. CANBERRA REFUSED TO INCREASE ITS VERY MODEST TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM HERE, AND NICHOLSON, WHILE HAVING ACCESS TO OTHER GOM OFFICIALS AND BEING ABLE TO CONDUCT NECESSARY BUSINESS, WAS IN THE AWKWARD POISTION OF NEVER HAVING BEEN RECEIVED BY THE PRIME MINISTER/FOREIGN MINISTER OF THE GOVERNMENT TO WHICH HE WAS ACCREDITED.

5. DESPITE THIS SNUB, NICHOLSON DISAGREED WITH THE VIEW HELD BY SOME AUSTRALIANS (INCLUDING HIS PREDECESSOR) THAT THE HIGH COMMISSION IN MALTA SHOULD BE CLOSED OR REDUCED TO A SMALLER OFFICE, RECOGNIZING CORRECTLY THAT THERE IS A LARGE RESERVOIR OF GOOD WILL TOWARD AUSTRALIA AMONG THE MALTESE PEOPLE. CANBERRA HAS AGREED; NICHOLSON WILL THEREFORE BE REPLACED, AND AGREEMENT HAS ALREADY BEEN REQUESTED. THE TRANSFER TO SANTIAGO, ACCORDING TO NICHOLSON, IS COMPLETELY UNRELATED TO THE STATE OF MALTESE-AUSTRALIAN RELATIONS.

6. IN TYPICAL MINTOFFIAN STYLE, AND AFTER NICHOLSON HAD RECONCILED HIMSELF TO LEAVING WITHOUT EVER HAVING BEEN RECEIVED BY THE ECCENTRIC PRIME MINISTER, MINTOFF CHANGED HIS MIND AT THE LAST MINUTE. ON JULY 9, LESS THAN 24 HOURS BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE, NICHOLSON WAS SUMMONED BY MINTOFF AND THE TWO TALKED FOR SOME TEN TO FIFTEEN MINUTES. MINTOFF GREETED NICHOLSON WARMLY AND REGRETTED THAT HE HAD "NOT BEEN ABLE" TO RECEIVE HIM EARLIER, CONFIDENTIAL

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ASSURING HIM THAT IT WAS "NOTHING PERSONAL" AND THAT THERE HAD SIMPLY BEEN "NOTHING TO DISCUSS." MINTOFF EXPRESSED A HOPE FOR BETTER MALTESE-AUSTRALIAN RELATIONS IN THE FUTURE, INCLUDING VISITS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES AT THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL. NICHOLSON "BIT HIS TONGUE" BUT NOT BEFORE REMINDING MINTOFF OF WHAT AUSTRALIA HAD BEEN DOING FOR MALTA. IN ADDITION TO AUSTRALIA HAVING FULFILLED A LONG TIME ROLE AS A HAVEN FOR MALTA'S

UNEMPLOYED, AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL HAS BEEN ACTIVELY SEEKING
FEASIBLE JOINT VENTURE PROJECTS WITH MALTESE PARTICIPATION.

7. COMMENT: MINTOFF'S PIQUE AND LONG-STANDING REFUSAL
TO RECEIVED THE POPULAR AUSTRALIAN HAS CAUSED ACUTE
EMBARRASSMENT TO MOST OTHER SENIOR GOM OFFICIALS.
APOLOGISTS HAVE ATTEMPTED TO EXPLAIN IT AWAY AS SIMPLY
ANOTHER OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S ECCENTRICITIES, BUT
WITHOUT REAL CONVICTION. CONSEQUENTLY, CANBERRA'S DECISION
TO REPLACE NICHOLSON HERE HAS BEEN RECEIVED WITH SOME
SURPRISE AND A GREAT DEAL OF RELIEF. SMITH

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